INTRODUCTION

Celebrating 100 years of the *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* and *Journal of the Medical Library Association*: a selection from each decade

T. Scott Plutchak, MA, AHIP

See end of article for author's affiliation.

DOI: 10.3163/1536-5050.100.4.S1

Let me be honest. From the moment I accepted Susan Starr's offer to curate a special supplement to celebrate 100 years of the *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* (*BMLA*)/*Journal of the Medical Library Association* (*JMLA*), I knew I was going to include the Doe lecture by Nina W. Matheson, AHIP, FMLA [1]. I remember standing in the back of the ballroom listening and knowing that it was changing my life.

So this is not a purely objective collection of the *BMLA*/*JMLA*'s "Greatest Hits," based on some systematic methodology. I had help from many people in coming up with the selections, but the final choices are my own. Susan and I put a request for recommendations in the *MLA News* and sent it out to a variety of email discussion lists. We quickly had more than fifty suggestions, almost all from the 1970s or later (Table 1, online only). I had decided that I would include just one article from each decade, so I needed to expand the pool of potential articles to those earlier years.

I sent a special request to the members of the History of the Health Sciences Section and that garnered some additional suggestions for earlier articles. Lucretia W. McClure, AHIP, FMLA, in particular, sent me over a dozen titles that she thought worthy of inclusion.

Joyce Backus at the National Library of Medicine (NLM) supplied me with download data and citation data from PubMed Central (PMC). I searched Google Scholar for more citation data (interestingly, there is no correlation between the number of times an article is cited by other articles in PMC and the number of overall citations identified by Google Scholar). That expanded my set so that I had at least some likely candidates from each decade. The fun part now would be to whittle them down to one article each.

For the first decade, the choice was pretty easy. From 1918, William Osler's piece on "The Science of Librarianship" shows that from the very beginning of the association, there was an emphasis on applying scientific principles to the work done by medical librarians [2]. One of the founders of the Medical Library Association (MLA), Osler is best known for his many contributions to bringing medicine into the twentieth century, but this report of an address that he gave "at the opening of the Summer School of Library Service of the University of Wales at Aberystwyth, on July 31, 1917" demonstrates how seriously he took the application of scientific principles to the modern practice of librarianship.

Citation counts gave me several suggestions for the 1920s, and I was tempted to pick Margaret Brinton's "Medical Librarianship: Some of Its Present Day Problems," which addresses concerns about the training of medical librarians that would resonate with many of us today [3]. But I settled on Laura E. Smith's "A Suggestion to the Medical Librarians," as much for the elegance of its language as its depth [4]. Smith starts out, "It is a popular notion that librarians lead a very easy life, exempt from much of the care, labor and trouble that attend most pursuits of the rest of mankind, and often it is questioned if they are required to spend much study and preparation for the practice of their profession." Sound familiar?

She goes on to point out the invaluable assistance that the librarian brings to the practice of medicine: "as we are living in an age when time-saving is the great necessity in the helping of our wizard—the doctor, it is the privilege of the librarian to be his leader in what often proves to be his 'Court of last resort.'" In 1920, Smith was a librarian at the New York Academy of Medicine. I believe that she would fit in very well as a member of the profession today.

A familiar topic appeared repeatedly as I browsed through the issues from the 1930s. Exemplifying the old adage about nothing new under the sun was the great Fielding Garrison's 1932 analysis of "The High Cost of Current Medical Periodicals" [5]. You will find much that is familiar and much that is strange and unexpected in Garrison's comparative survey of the costs of medical periodicals from different countries and his comments on some of the reasons for those differences.

In her presidential address at the 48th annual meeting in Galveston, Texas, Janet Doe described, "The Development of Education for Medical Librarianship" [6]. As mentioned above, the training

of medical librarians has been a constant issue of concern for the association, and many articles on the theme and its variations appear throughout the 100 years of publication. Given the important role that she played in the development of the association and the profession at large, I was quite pleased to be able to represent the decade of the 1940s with a true Janet Doe lecture! (Of course, the first *awarded* lecture given in her name was Gertrude Annan's in 1967 [7]).

The 1950s are represented by "The Rise and Development of the American Medical Periodical 1797–1850" [8]. This is a solid work of scholarship by Myrl L. Ebert, AHIP, FMLA, a woman who, at the time, was just one year past receiving her master's degree in library science (although she had been working in libraries for several years) and who went on to a very distinguished career. It attests to the increasing role of the *BMLA* in presenting first-rate research articles as well as to our profession's abiding interest in the nature of the scientific literature.

It seemed to me that there was really only one possible pick for the 1960s. Has there been a hospital librarian active between 1965 and 2005 who did not rely on some version of the Brandon/Hill lists in honing a collection? The ongoing series of selected lists of books and journals for the small medical library, and the offspring lists covering nursing and allied health titles, were published on a regular basis in the *BMLA* (and its successor) for nearly forty years. Representing all of those progeny, we have here Alfred Brandon's first "Selected List of Books and Journals for the Small Medical Library" from 1965 [9]. The series ended only with the retirement of Dorothy Hill in 2002. It remains one of the most significant achievements of medical librarianship.

My task of choosing did not become any easier as I approached the decade of the 1970s. The number of recommendations was increasing. I had eight recommendations for that decade, but each had only been recommended once. Would citation counts help me? "Nonmediated Use of MEDLINE and TOXLINE by Pathologists and Pharmacists" by Winifred Sewell, AHIP, FMLA, and Alice Bevan was the clear standout, with forty-three citations in Google Scholar [10]. Scott Adams's "The Way of the Innovator: Notes toward a Prehistory of MEDLARS," although not as heavily cited, certainly marked another very significant moment in the development of the profession [11]. But a perusal of Google Scholar also brought me to Theresa C. Strasser's "The Information Needs of Practicing Physicians in Northeastern New York State," which had seventy-seven citations in Google Scholar and twenty-six in PMC [12]. When I was editor of the *JMLA*, information needs surveys were a frequent topic of submissions, and here was one of the first. It was sound methodologically and meticulous in its details, and the reason for its high citation count is that it set the stage for so much similar work that followed. But now I had a bit of a methodological quandary of my own. Strasser's article had not been recommended by anybody. Should I lean toward one of the articles that my contemporaries considered more memorable or lean more toward the bibliometric assessment of impact? And who was Strasser anyway? I certainly knew the reputations of Sewell and Adams, but Strasser's name was unfamiliar to me. I discovered that Strasser went on to a distinguished career with the New York State Library. When she wrote the 1978 article, she was still a student. She won the 1977 Rittenhouse Award for a similar study she had done of nurses. I went with the student.

For the 1980s, I was able to resolve a dilemma that the 1990s presented me with. I was happy to see that the most frequently recommended article was, indeed, Matheson's Doe lecture from 1995. Clearly, it had had an impact on many of my colleagues as well as on my young self. But right behind it, and with a walloping 223 citations in Google Scholar, was "The Impact of the Hospital Library on Clinical Decision Making: The Rochester Study" by Joanne G. Marshall, FMLA [13]. One of the most pressing issues for librarians has always been making the case for the importance of what we do, and the Rochester study has been a beacon toward that goal. How could I leave it out? But with my one article per decade constraint, I could not include both Marshall's study and Matheson's lecture.

There turned out to be an elegant solution. The Rochester study, after all, was based on another very highly cited article (126 in Google Scholar), David N. King's "The Contribution of Hospital Library Information Services to Clinical Care: A Study in Eight Hospitals," published (fortunately for me) in 1987 [14]. The impact of the Rochester study is undeniable, but without the King study that preceded it, which the Rochester team was able to learn from in designing their study, it would never have achieved that same impact. So King's paper is included here, standing as well for its noteworthy successor.

For all of the many intellectual powerhouses that we have had in the profession, Matheson probably had the biggest impact on my thinking about future roles for librarians and the changes that libraries would undergo. There was, of course, the Matheson/Cooper report, which laid the groundwork for the Integrated Advanced Information Management Systems (IAIMS) program [15]. But it was her elegantly delivered lecture, "The Idea of the Library

in the Twenty-First Century," that brought me (and, based on the comments I received in this inquiry, quite a number of others) to a new vision of what librarians could aspire to in the future [1].

There were many recommendations for the first decade of the 21st century, all quite worthy. There was, however, one clear standout, "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Clinical Medical Librarian Programs: A Systematic Review of the Literature," by Kay Cimpl Wagner and Gary D. Byrd, AHIP, FMLA [16]. This article is noteworthy in two ways: First, it documents the long history of writing about clinical librarian programs, going back into the 1970s, and as such, it stands in for quite a number of other articles that might have been included. Second, it applies a highly analytic systematic review technique to try to determine what we have actually learned from all of those articles. As it turns out, the conclusion is: not so much. We need to do a much better job of conducting research and analyzing and reporting the results. But as a perusal of the 100 years of our literature shows, we are making great progress. The article also makes a nice bracket to where we start this issue, with Osler's remarks on the science of librarianship. Our history is one of learning and experimenting and sharing knowledge and striving always to do better.

I did not set out to tell a particular narrative with these ten articles. My only goal when I began was to select ten interesting and notable pieces that could stand for their fellow articles, representing the long and illustrious history of the *JMLA* and its predecessor the *BMLA*. But perhaps a narrative of sorts does emerge, a reminder that no journal article exists in isolation and that every great and influential article exists in a web of connections to other work. Garrison's article indicates our ongoing struggle with serials pricing, Doe's represents our obsession with continuing training, King's leads to the Rochester study and many subsequent studies of our impact on clinical care. Wagner and Byrd's article measures decades of work in clinical librarianship. The themes represented in these articles are the themes that identified medical librarianship as a special profession over 100 years ago. The *BMLA* and then the *JMLA* have not just documented the development of those themes, they have been a critical component in that development and in helping us to shape the excellence that is in the profession now and that we will surely see in the future.

The great pleasure of doing this project was sampling articles from throughout the entire 100 year run. From every decade, I learned new things. In every decade, I found something relevant to my 21st century practice. These 100 years are not just the story of our past—they tell the story of our present and future as well.

REFERENCES

1. Matheson NW. The idea of the library in the twenty-first century. Bull Med Lib Assoc. 1995 Jan;83(1):1–7.
2. Osler W. The science of librarianship. Bull Med Lib Assoc. 1918 Apr;7(4):70–4.
3. Brinton M. Medical librarianship: some of its present day problems. Bull Med Lib Assoc. 1924 Oct;14(2–3):28–39.
4. Smith LE. A suggestion to the medical librarians. Bull Med Lib Assoc. 1920 Jan;9(3):30–3.
5. Garrison FH. The high cost of current medical periodicals. Bull Med Lib Assoc. 1932 Apr;20(4):165–9.
6. Doe J. The development of education for medical librarianship. Bull Med Lib Assoc. 1949 Jul;37(3):213–20.
7. Annan GL. The Medical Library Association in retrospect, 1937–1967. Bull Med Lib Assoc. 1967 Oct;55(4):379–89.
8. Ebert M. The rise and development of the American medical periodical 1797–1850. Bull Med Lib Assoc. 1952 Jul;40(3):243–76.
9. Brandon AN. Selected list of books and journals for the small medical library. Bull Med Lib Assoc. 1965 Jul;53(3):329–64.
10. Sewell W, Bevan A. Nonmediated use of MEDLINE and TOXLINE by pathologists and pharmacists. Bull Med Lib Assoc. 1976 Oct;64(4):382–91.
11. Adams S. The way of the innovator: notes toward a prehistory of MEDLARS. Bull Med Lib Assoc. 1972 Oct;60(4):523–33.
12. Strasser TC. The information needs of practicing physicians in northeastern New York State. Bull Med Lib Assoc. 1978 Apr;66(2):200–9.
13. Marshall JG. The impact of the hospital library on clinical decision making: the Rochester study. Bull Med Lib Assoc. 1992 Apr;80(2):169–78.
14. King DN. The contribution of hospital library information services to clinical care: a study in eight hospitals. Bull Med Lib Assoc. 1987 Oct;75(4):291–301.
15. Matheson NW, Cooper JAD. Academic information in the academic health sciences center: roles for the library in information management. J Med Educ. 1982 Oct;59(pt. 2):1–93.
16. Wagner KC, Byrd GD. Evaluating the effectiveness of clinical medical librarian programs: a systematic review of the literature. J Med Lib Assoc. 2004 Jan;92(1):14–33.

AUTHOR'S AFFILIATION

T. Scott Plutchak, MA, AHIP, tscott@uab.edu, Director, Lister Hill Library of the Health Sciences, University of Alabama at Birmingham, LHL 251, 1720 Second Avenue South, Birmingham, AL 35294-0013

Received June 2012; accepted June 2012